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AUTHOR	Carrington, Christine H.; Sedlacek, William E.
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ABSTRACT

A telephone survey of 500 people admitted to the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP), but who did not enroll in the fall of 1974, was conducted. Responses were received from 437 (87 percent) no-shows. Results indicated that 82 percent were attending a school outside Maryland and the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, while 34 percent attended a school in Maryland and 6 percent attended one in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, but outside Maryland; 317 of the (89 percent) no-shows attending a school were at a four-year school. The major reasons that no-shows did not attend UMCP were that it was not their first choice school (49 percent) and they did not have enough money to enroll (14 percent). The main reasons no-shows chose another school were smaller size, and more personal atmosphere (20 percent), and better school academically (16 percent). When asked what they liked most about UMCP, the no-shows said good course offerings (25 percent) and close to home (16 percent). When asked what they liked least about UMCP they said size (50 percent) and poor on-campus housing (2 percent). Specific suggestions to counter the negative reactions in recruiting students were made and discussed. (Author)

COUNSELING CENTER

Office of Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

College Park, Maryland

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COLLEGE PARK, MARYLAND

CHARACTERISTICS OF "NO-SHOWS" ACCEPTED FOR ADMISSION AT A LARGE UNIVERSITY

Christine H. Carrington and William E. Sedlacek*

Research Report # 7-74

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CHARACTERISTICS OF "NO-SHOWS"* ACCEPTED FOR ADMISSION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, COLLEGE PARK

Christine H. Carrington and William H. Sedlacek

Summary of Results

1. 437 of 500 (87%) responses were achieved.
2. 82% of the no-shows were attending another school; 13% were working.
3. Only 12% of the no-shows attending school were at community colleges.
4. The 280 no-shows reporting attended 112 different schools in 24 states, including Washington, D.C.
5. The main reasons no-shows did not come to UMCP were: not first choice (49%), and not enough money (14%).
6. No-shows chose other schools because of smaller size and more personal atmosphere (20%), and better school academically (16%).
7. No-shows like most about UMCP, the curriculum (25%), and close to home (16%).
8. No-shows liked least about UMCP, the size (50%) and poor on-campus housing (2%).
9. There were no significant differences on SAT scores between the no-shows and entering freshmen.

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Counseling Center
University of Maryland
College Park, Maryland

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SUMMARY

A telephone survey of 500 people admitted to the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP), but who did not enroll in the fall of 1974 was conducted. Responses were received from 437 (87%) no-shows. Results indicated that 82% were attending another school, and 13% were working. Forty-three percent were attending a school outside Maryland and the Washington, D. C. metropolitan area, while 34% attended a school in Maryland and 6% attended one in the Washington, D. C. metropolitan area, but outside Maryland. 317 of the 358 (89%) no-shows attending a school were at a four year school. The major reasons that no-shows did not attend UMCP were that it was not their first choice school (49%) and they did not have enough money to enroll (14%). The main reasons no-shows chose another school were smaller size, and more personal atmosphere (20%), and better school academically (16%). When asked what they liked most about UMCP, the no-shows said good course offerings (25%) and close to home (16%). When asked what they liked least about UMCP they said size (50%) and poor on-campus housing (2%).

Specific suggestions to counter the negative reactions in recruiting students were made and discussed.

One of the most difficult problems facing higher educational planners and program administrators is that there is little or no information available on admitted students who choose not to attend a given school. Thus we often do not know how or why students make their decisions, what programs are appealing or unappealing, and what other schools or institutions of society are in competition with a particular school.

There is considerable evidence that college and university enrollments have declined in recent years and are likely to remain stable through the 1970's and decline in the 1980's (Cartter, 1974). There is also some indication that students are more vocationally oriented and less likely to go to college for a general education (Anderson, 1973). Additionally, Nollen (1974) has demonstrated that the salary differential between college and high school graduates has been shrinking in recent years.

Raley (1972), in reviewing the literature, has identified four factors that appear to affect a student's selection of a college: (1) Factors internal to the institution, i.e., academic reputation and prestige of the school; (2) Factors external to the institution, i.e., location of the school, closeness to home; (3) Human influences outside of the student, i.e., encouragement or discouragement from friends, counselors, etc.; (4) Personal student factors, i.e., finances. Further support for these clusters is provided by the studies of Werts and Watley (1969), Stordahl (1970) and Anderson (1973).

However, a study done by the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) (1971) found that the variables influencing the decisions of black students were somewhat different than those cited above. The CEEB study found that the efficiency and promptness of schools in processing the application, the challenge of the educational program, and the academic prestige of the school were the primary variables influencing the decisions to attend college among black students. These findings are supported by Sedlacek (1975) and Sedlacek & Brooks (1975), who provide evidence that the whole sociocultural process of a typical black deciding to attend a college or university is different than that of a typical white.

Clements (1969), in a study done at Wisconsin State University at Stevens Point, found that of those students who were admitted but did not "show" in the fall of 1968, 45% went to other schools in the State. Eleven percent (of the 45%) went to small colleges in the State and 81% went to the University of Wisconsin.

At the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP), more than twice as many new freshmen are admitted each fall as actually matriculate. Since the budget for UMCP is based on enrollment, it was considered important to study the "no-shows" to determine why they did not come to UMCP and what could be done about attracting them to UMCP.

Method

A random sample of 500 people admitted to UMCP who did not enroll in the fall of 1974 were surveyed by telephone, using a structured interview containing closed and open-ended questions. Questions concerned their reasons for

nonattendance at UMCP and their suggestions for improvements in the school and the way their applications were handled. Trained undergraduate students did the telephoning and they made three attempts to contact each no-show at differing times of the day once they got a valid phone number. Quite often the no-show had moved and a new phone number had to be identified. If no valid phone number was available or the no-show could not be reached after three tries, or was out of the country, a new name was randomly drawn as a substitute. A total of 83 substitute names were drawn. Responses were analyzed with frequencies, percentages, chi square and t.

Results

A total of 437 responses (87%) were received, 89% in-state and 11% out of state residents. Table 1 indicates the frequency (N) and percentage of all subjects indicating a particular response. Table 1 shows that 82% of the subjects were attending another school, and nearly all of those other schools were four year colleges. Thirteen percent of the no-shows were working, nearly half at clerical-sales jobs. Forty-three percent were attending a school outside Maryland and the Greater Washington, D. C. area, while 34% attended a school in Maryland, and 6% attended a school in the Greater Washington, D. C. area, but outside Maryland.

Schools which enrolled at least 5 no-shows out of 280 reporting were: University of Maryland - Baltimore (30), Towson State (24), Montgomery (13), Virginia Tech (10), Prince Georges Community (8), Georgetown (8), George Washington (7), Pennsylvania (6), Morgan State (5), Georgia Tech (5), Loyola - Baltimore (5) and Mount St. Mary's (5). The 280 no-shows attended 112 different schools in 24 different states including the District of Columbia. More no-shows attended public schools (76%) than private schools (24%). Only 33 of 280 (12%) no-shows were attending community colleges.

The major reasons no-shows did not come to UMCP were that it was not their first choice school (49%), and that they did not have enough money to enroll (14%). The reasons no-shows chose another school were smaller size and more personal atmosphere (20%), better school academically (16%), closer to home (10%), financial aid available (7%), and out of state (7%). When asked what they liked most about UMCP, the no-shows said: good course offerings and curriculum (25%), close to home (16%), inexpensive (7%), and good academic reputation (6%). When asked what they liked least about UMCP, they said: size (50%), poor on-campus housing (2%), too close to home (2%), and not a serious intellectual environment (2%). No shows would like to see less bureaucracy and more individualization (18%), better on-campus housing (13%), and better communication from the Admissions Office (7%).

Table 2 shows that there were no significant differences in the SAT scores of no-shows and matriculants at UMCP, with the Verbal and Math means and standard deviation about average nationally. The only significant difference (chi square at .05) between in-state and out of state no-shows in reactions to UMCP was that out of staters were more likely to feel UMCP had a good academic reputation than in-staters.

Discussion

One of the most interesting findings was that so many of the no-shows were attending another school. With the lessened relative earning power of a college degree, combined with the lack of job availabilities in some fields, one might have expected more students to be working. This finding is supported by the relatively few no-shows attending community colleges. We might expect more vocationally oriented students to attend community colleges.

We are left then with the clear indication that UMCP is competing mostly with other four year schools around the country, not just in Maryland. The "ace-in-the-hole" theory, which is part of the folklore of a school like UMCP, has received some empirical support in this study. That is, nearly half the no-shows indicated that they applied to UMCP as a backup in case they did not get accepted at a school they preferred. However, UMCP does not appear to be losing the most able students as measured by SAT scores. But, since SAT scores were available at UMCP on only 285 of the 437 no-shows, it is possible that the best no-shows made their decisions early and did not have their scores sent to UMCP, thus resulting in a biased sample.

Large size, lack of financial aid, lesser academic reputation, poor on-campus housing and poor communications from the university seemed to be the primary negative points about UMCP reported by the no-shows. Let us examine the policy implications of these findings. The first reaction to "large size" might be to say that there really isn't much that can be done about it. However a good strategy at any school would be to portray seeming liabilities as assets in recruiting students. For instance, among the primary advantages of size is the achievement of diversity.

A large school can be viewed as a veritable cafeteria, in both academic and nonacademic areas, from which a student can pick and choose almost any course or lifestyle. If one wishes to switch from art to animal science or from a residence hall to a house in the country, this is possible at UMCP. Achieving a variety of experiences is important in any education. Additionally, the experience in interacting with students from different backgrounds, and with diverse ways of living is an ideal way to prepare for living in the larger society. This point has been found to be particularly important in recruiting minority students. Black students who take the view that learning how to handle all kinds of people, including bigots, will be useful to them, are more likely to remain in school than those blacks who think otherwise (see DiCesare, Sedlacek and Brooks 1972, and Sedlacek & Brooks 1975).

One study found that students preferred classes of less than 10 or more than 250 students to those in between (Chronicle of Higher Education, 1974). The authors suggest that the reason for the popularity of large classes is that once class size reaches a certain point, institutions tend to seek highly skilled lecturers to teach them. These results are generally compatible with a study done at UMCP on preferences of incoming freshmen (Landry and Sedlacek, 1972). They found that while 29% had a preference for small group study, 31% actually preferred some type of lecture.

The quality of the academic program at UMCP may be in part linked with the large size issue and could be countered with some of the previous arguments. Also, there is some tendency for in-state potential students to view the local school as less prestigious than a school farther away. However, a great deal more can be done to emphasize the academic side of UMCP. Aside from sports, few people in the State may have much of an idea of what is going on at the school, and it appears difficult for this campus to make substantial investments in building strong identifications between citizens and the campus. The interest and support shown concerning this research is an encouraging step in such a direction.

While lack of financial aid can be stated as a universal problem affecting most schools, there may be some additional things that could be done in this area. Private schools have generally been more aggressive in seeking funds from external sources than have public schools. A rethinking of the development activity of UMCP may be called for. A specific suggestion which may be possible due to the urban locations of UMCP would be to develop work-study programs funded by private sources. Students could be placed with local businesses or agencies which would complement the already existing federally funded programs.

While poor on-campus housing was cited as a negative feature by a few respondents, it is surprising that there were not more reactions by no-shows. Poor on-campus housing was defined as either lack of facilities or poor physical facilities. Poor on-campus housing has been a perennial problem at residential schools and the economics of renovation or new building may be impractical. However, a program pointing out the advantages of off-campus living or commuting could be incorporated into a student recruiting program. UMCP has one of the few commuter affairs offices in the country, and their expertise could be of great help in this effort.

Poor communication from the University perhaps symbolizes the key reason for no-shows at schools like UMCP. The prospective student is confronted with a series of separately mailed forms dealing with admissions, housing, financial aid, etc. Complexities reinforce the image of impersonality and the problems of large size. Black students are particularly "put off" by this treatment. A timely, well coordinated communication system from the school, complete with catalogs, materials, and presentations aimed at countering the key points raised by no-shows is necessary if a school is realistically to compete for student admissions.

Very often data of the type presented here are considered interesting but do not result in any change or action. Since these results contain so many implications for action, it is hoped that they will be acted upon by many segments of the campus.

That a modest turnabout in recruiting efforts by a large school may reap benefits is demonstrated by the reaction of the no-shows to the survey. Most respondents were surprised and pleased that UMCP was that interested in what they thought. The reactions of one no-show perhaps best exemplify the potential positive effects: "If that's how much you think of people at Maryland, I'm transferring next semester."

Table 1

Frequency and Percentage Responses of 437 No Shows

		N	%
1.	Why didn't you come to U. Md., College Park?		
	a. It was not my first choice school	213	49
	b. Not enough money to enroll	60	14
	c. Decided not to go to college now	23	5
	d. Other	121	28
	e. No response	20	5
2.	What are you doing now?		
	a. Working	56	13
	b. Attending another school	358	82
	c. Military service	3	1
	d. Nothing special	5	1
	e. Other	5	1
	f. No response	10	2
3.	If working:		
	a. Clerical/sales	25	6
	b. Semi-skilled or skilled	9	2
	c. Laborer	11	3
	d. Service	3	1
	e. Other	8	2
4.	If in school:		
	a. What kind of school?		
	(1) Another four year college	317	73
	(2) Community college	33	8
	(3) Technical/vocational school	4	1
	(4) Other	4	1
	b. Location of school		
	(1) In Maryland	147	34
	(2) Greater Washington area (other than b1 above)	25	6
	(3) Out of state (other than b2 above)	186	43
	c. Why did you choose this school?		
	(1) Smaller size/more personal atmosphere	88	20
	(2) Better school academically	71	16
	(3) Closer to home	42	10
	(4) Financial aid available	31	7
	(5) Out of state	31	7
	(6) Less expensive	10	2
	(7) Recommended by family/friends	5	1
	(8) Other	29	6
	(9) No response	130	30

Table 1 - continued

	N	%
5. What did you like most about U. Md., College Park?		
a. Good course offerings/good curriculum	107	25
b. Close to home	68	16
c. Good academic reputation	30	7
d. Sports/extra-curricular activities	25	6
e. Inexpensive	12	3
f. Good educational resources (labs., etc.)	13	3
g. Other	11	3
h. No response	171	39
6. What did you like least about U. Md., College Park?		
a. Size	219	50
b. Location	10	2
c. Not a serious/intellectual environment	9	2
d. Curriculum did not meet needs	7	2
e. Too close to home	6	1
f. Poor on-campus housing	3	1
g. Other	40	9
h. No response	143	33
7. What would you like to see changed at U. Md., College Park?		
a. Less bureaucracy/more individualization	77	18
b. Nothing	57	13
c. More financial aid	29	7
d. Better on-campus housing	14	3
e. Better communication from Admissions Office	3	2
f. Other	71	16
g. No response	186	43

Table 2.

SAT Means and Standard Deviations for

UMCP Freshmen, Fall, 1974 and for No-Shows, Fall, 1974*

		Verbal		Math	
	N	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
NO-SHOWS	285	47.83	10.19	50.74	11.10
FRESHMEN, FALL 1974	4686	46.66	9.85	50.83	10.43

* Differences not significant at .05, using t

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